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ABSTRACT

Most traditional counseling methods do not consider the Native American student's world view and values. As a result, he is not able to relate well with the counselor and does not gain insight and self-understanding, so there is a low rate of return for further sessions. A much higher degree of cultural sensitivity needs to be developed in order to effectively understand the unique way of life which affects his needs and problems. Most tribes share attitudes of non-interference, are non-emotional in expressing their feelings and desires to outsiders, use non-traditional patterns and styles of speaking, and are group oriented, rather than individualistic, all of which the counselor should take into consideration when deciding the most beneficial approaches to use. Beginning with a Directive method (in which the counselor acts as an advisor) and then changing to a Nondirective technique (in which the student takes the initiative) seems to be helpful in establishing a relationship conducive to helping the student with his own situations. This method allows the use of philosophical and psychological foundations which can be effective in relating to the underlying foundations of Native American values in a more productive way than the usual limited, singular one. (JD)

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COUNSELING NATIVE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL AND
COLLEGE STUDENTS



by

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In a study to examine counselees' perceptions of the counseling relationship (Foley, 1974) it was concluded that there is a significant correlation between how clients feel about their counselor, either in a positive or negative manner, and the quality of the counseling relationship. Further, counselees' identification with the counselor and experience of insight and self-understanding are the most important factors in predicting the quality of the counseling relationship. Because most traditional counseling methods do not consider the Native American world view or Native American values, many, if not most, Native American counselees do not identify with the counselor, nor do they experience insight and self-understanding as a result of the session. This results in a very low rate of return for further sessions.

The counselor's goal and the counselor's role will depend on the set of tools and the philosophy learned in school. These are played out in what the counselor picks up on from the counselee's talk. Once he picks up on a certain part of the counselee's talk, he will question, evaluate, or narrate, according to his goal, and his view of his role as a counselor. The most commonly used counseling theories are

Directive and Nondirective. The Directive, or "clinical counseling" (Lefener, 1950) places emphasis on a problem; what caused the problem and how it can be solved. The counselor interprets for the counselee the cause(s) and/or the treatment(s). In the Nondirective, or "client-centered" (Rogers, 1951) the counselee plays the main role, with the counselor keeping quiet and observing.

Most counselors working in high schools and colleges use the Directive approach, while social workers and mental hygienists favor the Nondirective. A spirit of compromise shows up in the Electric theory (Stefflre, 1972) in which a counselor may switch from Directive to Nondirective to Role Playing depending on the counselee. However, most counselors usually select a theory of counseling they see as best suitable to their own personality and their own concept of counseling.

By methodologically looking at scripts of Directive and Nondirective counseling styles (Stefflre, 1972), we see the counselor using the Directive method asking questions that are open, direct, and to the point, offering commands that serve as questions, and offering some direct advice. The counselor using the Nondirective method asks very few direct questions, but relies heavily on restatement of the counselee's remarks, which serve as questions. The Nondirective counselor usually gives no direct guidance or advice, letting the client come to his or her own conclusions. These methods seem to be

used without regard to the racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic factors of the counselee, despite the fact that cultural sensitivity is something all counselors should have developed.

Tribes differ from one another in homes, physical stature, and language. The Native Americans are not a single people with a single way of life, a single language, or a single kind of educational need. Each group has its own unique history, its own unique way of life and its own unique problems. However, there are many traits all tribes seem to share. They use shame as punishment, rather than guilt. Native Americans do not like to make public mistakes by giving a wrong answer. Even with a correct answer, they would prefer to be praised privately rather than publicly. They are not time oriented, nor are they habituated to work, as is Western Man (Burton and Siler, 1979).

The Anglo over culture is one of "I am my brother's keeper" (Lujan, 1980), and if one is doing wrong it is the Anglo's obligation to straighten out the wrong doer. They grant freedom to all individuals but reserve the right to interfere. The Native American comes from a sub-culture of non-interference. If someone is doing wrong it is not the Native American's obligation to point out the mistake to the wrong doer. In fact, his obligation is to NOT point out the mistake; ignore it; pretend he did not see or hear it. It is a philosophy of "I'm nobody to be telling somebody else what to do".

One must respect the Native American, and never talk down to him. However, do not expect all Native American counselees to look you in the eyes when you are talking to them. In most Indian tradition lowering the eyes and the head shows respect. They consider staring or being stared at as impolite. Do not expect all Native Americans to volunteer they do not understand. In fact, in some tribal groups, the Native American is not allowed to ask questions (Lujan and Dobkins, 1978). A Shoshone Indian may point by sticking out his lower lip in the desired direction. The non Indian counselor may interpret this as a rude facial expression showing defiance. Because most Native Americans do not display emotions in public, the non Indian counselor will have a difficult time trying to read the depth of emotion felt by the Native American Counselee.

Cultural sensitiveness is something all counselors of Native Americans should have, including a cultural awareness of differing communication styles. Ruben (1977) reminds us of:

...the need to be alert and sensitive to the needs, orientations, values, aspirations, and particularly the communication styles of other persons with whom one interacts.

It is essential for counselors to be aware of Native American styles of speaking in order to establish a relationship with a Native American Counselee. Cooley (1979) wrote that although Native American speeches vary in details of organization, a strong similarity exists in general patterns

of organization. Cooley continues:

In Native American culture it is the role of a public speaker to share with his audience as much of his knowledge as he can about the subject, but it is the role of the listener to put that information together and to arrive at a conclusion about its worth, or about how it applies to the subject at hand.

The counselor, in effect, becomes a public speaker when a Native American counselee comes into the office. The Native American will expect the counselor to share with him as much of the knowledge about the subject that he has, but will at the same time expect the counselor to let him (the counselee) arrive at a conclusion about its worth and how it applies.

A counselor might do well using the Directive method on Native American counselees UNTIL the counselor begins to point out suggested treatments, conclusions, or remedies for the problem. Not that the Native American does not want treatments, conclusions, or remedies, but he wants to be able to make his own choice from several alternatives. On the other hand, the Nondirective method would cause the counselee to decide that the quiet, observing counselor knew nothing about the subject, and certainly would not be expected to return for further sessions.

In addition to being aware of communication styles, we need to be aware that to the Indian, the group is more important than his own individuality. Individuality and competition, important white values, conflict with the

Native American groupness. The inherent Indian orientation is toward the group, group endeavor and group achievement. There is need for the development of a new set of tools and a new philosophy for dealing with Native American counselees, which includes consideration for their forms of speaking, their world view, and their values. The Native American who has reached the high school, and especially the college classroom is there mostly because of his own determination and endurance against the odds of the over-culture, and because of great financial sacrifice on the part of himself, his family, and in many cases, his tribe. He enters the counseling session with great concern for his extended family.

The counselor needs to show, and feel, an empathy for the Native American's extended family and understand and accept the close family ties. If he establishes a good relationship with the counselee, he will, in effect, become a part of that extended family during the sessions. Some counselors try to push the Native Americans toward the average middle class non Indian "ideal" of becoming self sufficient, where "growing-up" means no longer going to parents for advice. They urge him to think OF himself, to consider his own feelings, both of which are counter to his Native American values which stress the importance of advice from, and respect for one's elders, and the importance of the group over the individual.

In most tribal settings, leaders are followed because the Native Americans choose to follow. The leader shows himself to be an expert in a specific area, and therefore others elect to follow him. The counselor of Native Americans must act and react in a fashion that will add to the Native American's respect for the counselor. The Anglo world has told him "Here is a leader, an authority (the counselor)", and he has now come to the counselor in hopes he will not speak in forked-tongue. The counselor has a much better chance of forming a relationship with the Native American counselee if he or she has developed a sensitivity to Native American world view, and the Native American set of values, including communication styles. This will enhance the probability of return by the counselee for further help and guidance.

In intercultural or cross cultural counseling, we must begin to function from the standpoint of the counselee's world view if we are to adequately evaluate and meet the needs of a particular culture. Not enough can be said about communication in this matter. Philipsen (1972) wrote of Native American speech:

Speech is "talking it over" as the most important means of persuasion; speaking and thinking are ways of energizing and securing knowledge.

It is suggested that the counselor of Native Americans learn the art of "talking it over" with the counselee.

Findings indicate that the counselor's use of self disclosure of his own or similar problems (Pedersen, 1976) in individual interviews elicited greater numbers of self disclosure from the counselee. Perhaps this would be a start in learning the art of "talking it over" with the Native American counselee. One of the most frustrating and most frequently voiced problems of Native American students on the University of Oklahoma Campus is "They (parents, family, tribe) send me here to get an education and when I go home they complain about how much I have changed". Among the "talking it over" is to remind them that the wheat farmer in Western Oklahoma says the same thing to his daughter or son when they return home the first time. To know that problems experienced are not unique to his culture, but a problem for all students living away from home for the first time gives him more to consider as he tries to cope with his own situation.

It is suggested that those who are in the profession of counseling should reconsider their counseling goals and their counseling roles in light of intercultural counseling. Perhaps the tools and the philosophy learned in school and played out in what the counselor picks up from the counselee's talk should be reexamined. From the results of a study on counseling Amerindian College Students (Ross, 1975) comes the realization that the philosophical and psychological foundations for counseling Native Americans are synonymous

with the underlying foundation of Native American values.

The commonly used Directive and Nondirective approaches for counseling may do well in the counseling of non Indian counselees, but apparently have been a dismal failure with Native Americans, as evidenced by the high non-return of Native American counselees to Non Indian counselors on both the high School and the college campuses (Lujan, 1979).

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